

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers September 3, 2003

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This year's campaign spotlights the positive actions that each driver can take to ensure their safety and the safety of others sharing the road as they drive for work or commute to and from work.

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Drive Safely Work Week Campaign Toolkits
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Traffic Safety News...

Seat Belt Use Rate at All-Time High

U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Secretary Norman Y. Mineta recently announced that safety belt use in the United States has reached 79 percent - the highest level in the nation's history. Every region of the country registered increases in belt use since 2002, according to a new survey by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The nationwide survey was conducted after the massive "Click It or Ticket" mobilization in May, the largest-ever nationwide law enforcement effort to increase safety belt use. "We should all be proud of the efforts that went into this historic accomplishment," Secretary Mineta said. "But, make no mistake about it; our work is not done yet. The Bush administration is committed to safety as its highest transportation priority, and we will not be satisfied until everyone buckles up for every trip." **To view the full press release, visit the NHTSA website at**

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2003&filename=pr39-03.html>.

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Tire Makers Want Safer Standard for Tire Pressure Monitors

Tire manufacturers pressed the government to tighten proposals for measuring tire pressure, saying technology under consideration would not adequately warn drivers about under inflated tires. The Rubber Manufacturers Association (RMA), which represents U.S. and overseas tire makers, petitioned NHTSA to boost the minimum point at which a monitoring system would tell drivers to adjust their air pressure. Safety experts that include NHTSA engineers concluded the direct system would be more effective but were forced by the White House to give the industry the less expensive choice. **For the RMA press release and more information, visit**

<http://www.rma.org/newsroom/release.cfm?ID=93>. **Michelin story**
<http://greenvilleonline.com/news/business/2003/07/29/2003072911221.htm>.

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More Than 2 Million Motorists Are Getting Behind the Wheel with Defective Eyesight

More than two million motorists, including company car and van drivers, could be getting behind the wheel with defective eyesight, putting themselves and other drivers' lives in danger. Latest research based on eye tests throughout the UK has estimated 2.5 million drivers have poor, uncorrected eyesight. The findings came to light during a survey carried out in Glasgow, Manchester, Coventry and London, in which just fewer than 1,000 adults who have not had eyesight correction, two-thirds of them car drivers, were given a basic eye test. Of those, 35% failed a basic Snellen Chart test (the standard eyesight test used by opticians). Of those, 33% of the failures said they were "not surprised."

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Disposable Camera Saved a UK Company 3,500 Pounds in Crash Costs

A disposable camera worth less than £10 kept in a driver's vehicle glove box saved his company more than £3,500 in crash costs when he was involved in a collision. The camera evidence was used to successfully challenge a third party claim because it was clear from the pictures that the value of damage to the other driver's car had been inflated. The firm's insurer claims photographic evidence was paramount in negotiations and in successful defense of the claim. The broker is now preparing to launch a trial scheme in which it will scrap its insurance excess if drivers use a camera to record damage immediately after a crash.

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Distracted Driving Should Be in Driver's License Manuals

Only six states' driver's license manuals contain specific sections on distracted driving, according to a new survey released by AAA. To help educate new drivers about potentially deadly distractions, AAA is encouraging states to include a model section on distracted driving in their driver's license manuals and educational curricula. Although some states include partial information on potential distracting activities, just six states (Arkansas, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Virginia and Wisconsin) dedicate a specific section to distracted driving.

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More Than 2 of 5 U.S. Adults Report Traffic Congestion as Problem

More than two of five adults in the United States report that traffic congestion is a problem in their communities, according to results from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics' (BTS) Omnibus Household Survey. The BTS survey found more concern about congestion in metropolitan areas where almost half the residents surveyed said congestion is a problem. Only one-fifth of their non-metropolitan counterparts reported traffic congestion to be a problem in their communities. The Omnibus Household Survey tracks the general public's attitudes about various transportation issues. **To view the Omnibus, visit the BTS website at <http://www.bts.gov/omnibus/>.**

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Side Airbags are Reducing Deaths

Side airbags that include head protection are reducing deaths by about 45 percent among drivers of passenger cars struck on the driver's side. Side airbags that protect the chest and abdomen, but not the head, also are reducing deaths, but they're less effective (about 10 percent). These are the major findings of an Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) study of the real-world effectiveness of side airbags. It's the first such study to estimate the effectiveness of this type of occupant protection. **For the full press release, visit the IIHS website at**

http://www.highwaysafety.org/news_releases/2003/pr082603.htm.

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FMCSA Denied Petitions for Reconsideration on Hours-of-Service

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) announced it has denied eight petitions for reconsideration from organizations that want the hours-of-service final rule altered. Published on April 28, the new hours-of-service final rule addresses the issue of driver fatigue and sets standards for

driving and off-duty time. The previous rules had been in effect with few changes for more than 60 years. The petitions were in four categories: requests to allow off-duty time to extend the 14-hour on-duty limit; to exempt utility vehicles and workers from the hours-of-service regulations; for miscellaneous changes, such as changing the definition of commercial motor vehicles; and to allow early compliance with the new hours-of-service rules before the Jan. 4, 2004, effective date. **This final hours-of-service rule can be viewed by searching for docket number FMCSA-97-2350 at <http://dms.dot.gov/>.**

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Auto Insurance Rates Could Rise by Six Percent

Rising costs of medical care, vehicle repair, jury awards, automobile theft and fraud are expected to drive up auto insurance rates by six percent in 2004, according to an analysis by the Insurance Information Institute (III). For more information, visit the III website at <http://www.iii.org/media/industry/additional/2004autooutlook/>.

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Survey Shows Vehicles in U.S. Households Outnumber Drivers

The first National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) of the 21st century, released by the USDOT shows vehicles in U.S. households outnumber drivers. NHTS, a joint project of BTS and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), reports:

- o An average of 1.9 personal vehicles is owned or available to U.S. households; more than the 1.8 drivers per household.
- o 8 percent of U.S. households do not have a vehicle.
- o 90 percent of long-distance trips are made by personal vehicle.
- o 17 percent of adults report having used public transit in the last two months.
- o 13 percent of long distance trips over 50 miles from home to the farthest destination are for commuting to and from work.
- o Almost 9 percent of adults report having a medical condition that limits travel.

For the full report, visit the BTS website at

http://www.bts.gov/products/national_household_travel_survey/highlights_of_the_2001/.

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Personalized Microchip to Be Put in All U.K. Cars

U.K. transport officials are reportedly drawing up plans to fit all cars in Britain with a personalized microchip. It means drivers breaking the law can be prosecuted by computer. The Department for Transport is coordinating the project which also has involvement from the police and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. The chip inside the car would report a wide range of offences including speeding, road tax evasion and illegal parking. The plan has already met opposition from civil liberties groups and some motoring groups.

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Fatigued Driving is a Major Problem for Business Travelers

NHTSA estimates that drowsiness is the primary cause of 100,000 police-reported crashes each year, resulting in at least 76,000 injuries and 1,500 deaths. With exhaustion an ever-present danger, and with more business travelers switching from air travel to driving after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and subsequent cuts in corporate travel budgets, the likelihood of becoming one of those highway statistics has only increased. Add to that all the other afflictions common to business travelers like jet lag, sleepless nights in motels, and the stress of meetings on the run, and you have a deadly formula for highway crashes. Of the 569 respondents to an unscientific survey this month on the Yahoo Autos Web site (www.autos.yahoo.com) who reported that they had driven a car on a business trip of at least

200 miles, 58 percent said that they had experienced drowsiness. To fight it, 48 percent said they listened to upbeat music, 45 percent rolled down the windows or turned on the air-conditioning, 39 percent drank caffeinated beverages, 10 percent talked on their cell phones and 10 percent did

nothing. Only 19 percent pulled over and took a nap. (The numbers add up to more than 100 percent because many drivers tried two or more of the tactics.)

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Do Messages on Electronic Signs Over Freeways Contribute to Traffic Congestion?

A simulated driving study by the University of Minnesota suggests that some drivers do slow down to read the signs. If the freeway is full, slowdowns of any kind contribute to congestion. The study concludes that delays depend on the traffic volume when the signs are in use. It recommends easy-to-understand messages as a way to reduce the number and extent of slowdowns. Two signs used in the simulation study did cause drivers to slow. Thirteen percent slowed by at least 2 miles per hour and up to 13 mph for the sign advising: CRASH AT WYOMING AVE USE THOMPSON EXIT. And 20 percent slowed by at least 2 mph and up to 13 mph to read the sign saying: AMBER ALERT RED FORD TRUCK MN LIC# SLM 509.

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Playing Loud Music More Annoying Driving Habit than Red Light Jumping

Research from a U.K. motoring support firm, the RAC on its own drivers has shown that only 9% of its drivers voted red light jumpers as the most annoying driving habit, compared with 24% for young people playing loud music. Hogging the middle lane was voted as the most annoying habit, with 75% of RAC company car drivers agreeing. In second place were aggressive tailgaters (63%) and in third position, misuse of indicators (45%). Other road annoyances include motorway queue jumpers with 45% of the vote, bad lane/roundabout discipline at 39%, people using mobile phones (33%), leaving lights on full beam (18%) and leaving indicators on (9%).

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New York Issued More Than 130,000 Tickets for Driving with Handheld Cell Phone Violations

New York police officers have issued more than 130,000 tickets for violations of the state's prohibition against drivers talking on hand-held cellular telephones, and state officials say motorists are starting to get the message about the danger they pose. The ban, which police started to enforce in December 2001, is gaining recognition among drivers in a way similar to the slow but steady acceptance of the state's 1984 mandatory seat-belt law, said state Assemblyman Felix Ortiz. "They know that not only are police becoming vigilant, they (drivers) are in a position to get violations," said Ortiz, a Brooklyn Democrat who championed the cell phone ban in the state Legislature. Violators face \$100 fines.

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Traffic Safety News for our Families...

55 NHTSA Grants Awarded to 48 States

U.S. DOT Secretary Norman Y. Mineta announced 55 NHTSA grants totaling nearly \$7.5 million to 48 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the four U.S. territories, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The funds will help implement child passenger protection programs. The grants are authorized under a framework created by Section 2003(b) of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). With these grants states may fund activities such as child safety seat checkpoints at safety events and during enforcement efforts; permanent fitting inspection stations; loaner programs; education and information outreach to rural, low-income and minority communities; education and training activities targeted to Native American tribes; education and training activities to reach children with special needs; educational outreach to elementary and secondary schools; promotion of child passenger

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training; and training and education for judges to promote enforcement. **For more information, visit the NHTSA website at**

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/nhtsa/announce/press/pressdisplay.cfm?year=2003&filename=pr38-03.html>.



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